Unconscientious Resisters

Antibiotics kill bacteria. That's why they save lives...except when they don't work.

Here's at least part of the problem: Antibiotics are routinely fed to cattle, hogs, and poultry to make them grow faster. That major–and unnecessary–use boosts the odds that bacteria will become immune to antibiotics. And if you happen to get an infection caused by one of those resistant bacteria, the antibiotic your doctor prescribes could be useless. That could kill you.

We have filed a petition with the Food and Drug Administration asking that medically useful antibiotics be banned from animal feed. You can help by signing and mailing this coupon or, better yet, by writing or e-mailing in your own words.

To: Commissioner Jane E. Henney
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5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857
(JHENNEY@oc.fda.gov)

From: Joyce E. Van Sluyter
102 Priscilla Drive
Sewickley, PA 15143

As a member of the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), I urge you to save human lives by banning the use of medically useful antibiotics in animal feed. Adding antibiotics to feed in order to promote growth can make bacteria resistant to those antibiotics. And that can leave physicians with no way to treat life-threatening bacterial infections in humans. That's why I support the petition filed by CSPI.

antibacterials and are marketed as germ-killing soaps, kitchenware and even toys. There is no evidence that such products prevent infection, says Dr. Stuart Levy of the Tufts University Medical School. Worse, he adds, they may alter the natural bacteria population by killing the susceptible bacteria and encouraging the growth of resistant strains—bacteria that will not bow either to the antibacterial agent or, in the worst case, to antibiotics taken by mouth. Resistant, disease-producing bacterial populations are rampant in hospitals, where such products are necessary.

What can we do? In addition to taking medications as prescribed, we can stop asking our doctors for antibiotics for viral infections. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 50 million of the annual 150 million outpatient prescriptions for antibiotics are unnecessary.

We can wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly, not just to get rid of pesticide residue but also to get rid of the resistant bacteria that are left over from the use of those pesticides. And we can use antibacterials around the house only when the need is real, such as caring for sick people whose defenses are weakened.

The problem is already of serious proportions, and we must all do our part to stop it from growing out of control.

AVANT

Ask Marilyn

Do you think that in the near future there will be a severe outbreak of disease in the world that nobody can stop?

—Shelley Baker and Katie Sabongi, Woodbury (Minn.) Junior High School

Bacteria are growing more resistant to antibiotics —and we have mostly ourselves to blame

Such diseases already may be taking hold: AIDS, for example. But another major emerging problem is bacterial infections that are resistant to all known antibiotics: the so-called superbugs. Sadly, we're causing this situation ourselves—for example, when we stop taking our prescriptions too soon or give a few pills to sick friends and family. This encourages the growth of resistant strains of harmful bacteria.

Another way is when we take antibiotics for viral infections, such as colds or the flu. Patients like prescriptions, and doctors often try to please them. But antibiotics have no impact on viral infections; so, when taken for these illnesses, the antibiotics merely kill off susceptible benign bacteria in our bodies. This has significant negative consequences.

Bacteria in general are a necessary part of life, and the great majority of them are harmless. In fact, those benign bacteria help protect us from disease by competing with the small minority of harmful bacteria. When we kill benevolent or bystander bacteria, we encourage the growth of harmful bacteria in ourselves as well as the growth of resistant bacteria in the general bacterial population.

A recent trend may cause a new problem: the growing use of antibacterials, such as disinfectants and antiseptics, around the house. This includes products that have been impregnated with

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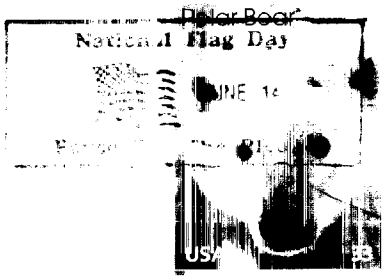

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